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The
**SINGLE
STAR**
CAPTAIN
ED. GRIERSON



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FROM

Victor S. Clark





T H E S I N G L E S T A R
BY CAPTAIN F. D. GRIERSON

THE SINGLE STAR

BY

CAPTAIN F. D. GRIERSON

Author of "The A. B. C. of Military Law," etc.



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Victor S. Clark

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THE SINGLE STAR



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Chapter I

John Edward Martin laid down his dividers and stretched himself wearily. For five hours he had bent over his drawing board, his mind concentrated on the intricate design which grew upon the white paper with a rapidity which would have surprised an uninitiated observer. But no such prying eyes were there to watch, for John was snugly hidden away in a little room far from the huge drawing office in the main building of Messrs. Grate, Gunn and Co.'s works—a little room of which only the partners, the General Manager and John himself possessed a key. For in that room were made the plans of certain secret contrivances destined for the discomfiture of grey-clothed enemies many miles away—devices invented and improved by cunning

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experts, for Messrs. Grate, Gunn and Co. made many things for their country's soldiers and sailors which had not been contemplated when the firm's articles of association were drawn up.

John's body was only twenty-seven years old, but his head was alleged by humorous (and perhaps slightly envious) colleagues to be at least three score and ten. To a natural aptitude for drawing he added a good knowledge of mathematics and a profound capacity for holding his tongue, with the result that he was entrusted with work for which discretion was even more necessary than draughtsmanship.

John was naturally bucked—to use the pleasing idiom of the day—at the confidence reposed in him, but alas! “man never is, but always *to be* blessed,” as the General Manager, who was of a literary turn of mind when not in the office, told him.

“You don't know when you're well off,” said the G.M. “You're doing valuable—I may say, *most* valuable—work for the country, and the firm are pleased with you. Hem! I may say, quite pleased. Mr. Henry remarked

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to me only yesterday—— However, that's not the point. Let me see: how much are you getting now?"

"It isn't the money, sir," answered John; "you know it isn't that. The firm's been very good, sir—I quite realise that. Only, when all the other fellows one knows, nearly, are out *there* . . . out doing something *real* . . ."

John sighed as he painfully straightened his back. (He could almost hear it creak.) Thoughtfully he removed the drawing pins which fastened the big plan to the board, then started as the private telephone rang sharply in the silence of the room.

"Yes, sir? . . . Yes; just finished in this moment. . . . Oh, a bit stiff, sir, but I wanted to get it done. . . . To tell *me*, sir? I'll be along at once. . . ."

What could the G.M. have to tell him, he wondered. Very friendly tone in his voice, too. Well, he'd soon know, anyhow.

Rolling up his drawing he left the office, the patent lock snapping sharply as the door closed behind him.

"Come in," said the General Manager's voice as he knocked at the heavy door marked

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"Private." "Ah, Martin, come in, come in. Now, let's see . . ."

He bent over the plan for some moments, examining its details with the keen scrutiny of the expert, then, looking up, smiled with the frank friendliness which "got more out of" his staff than the extra pay for overtime.

"Excellent, Martin," he said. "A really good piece of work, and done in a wonderfully short time. We can go ahead with the job right away. I shall specially mention this to the partners."

"Thank you, sir," murmured John, flushing with pleasure.

The G.M. leaned back in his chair, and swung his pince-nez by their cord.

"You still want to go and be killed, do you?" he said, smiling.

John started.

"Yes, sir," he replied, with a brevity not intended to be humorous.

"Well, well," said his chief, smiling rather thoughtfully as he looked at the grave young face; "I suppose we must help you in your suicidal desire."

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John's lips parted and his eyes began to sparkle.

"Not to beat about the bush," went on the G.M., "we're getting in a man I know of—a good fellow and a sound craftsman. He's been out and left a leg somewhere in France, as the communiqués say. The point is, he's trustworthy and capable, and so we're going to put him in your place and get you released to go and get blown into pieces. *Now* are you satisfied? Of course, we'll keep your job open in case there's a fragment or two of you left to come back!"

John stood up, his heart thumping like the big engine in the dynamo room.

"I hope, sir," he began, unsteadily, "you don't think me ungrateful——"

The G.M. rose and his fingers gripped John's strongly.

"My boy," he said, "you're . . . you're a good lad. I'll tell you a secret: if I were twenty years younger I'd be coming with you!"

Chapter II

"Martin, John Edward," said the Sergeant, and John stepped forward to the table. He had been ordered to present himself at the Depot of the Loyal Clayshire Regiment at ten o'clock in the morning, and had naturally put in an appearance at nine-thirty.

The Sergeant, a stout, cheerful man whose ribbons showed that war was no new experience for him, smiled as he told him to sit down and wait. He was used to youngsters, "full of beans," who wanted to go straight out to France and bayonet Boches.

So John sat himself down in the bare, white-washed Orderly Room, chastely furnished with a couple of collapsible tables, some chairs, a safe, a few cupboards and a telephone. From an adjoining room, where a couple of clerks sat at work, came the intermittent clink of a typewriter.

John was roused from a day dream in which the banging of doors became a bombardment,

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and the rattle of the typewriter lengthened into bursts of machine-gun fire, by the sudden entrance of an officer, whose three stars showed his rank to be that of a captain.

"Morning, Sergeant Jones," said the newcomer, tossing his hat, gloves and cane on a chair and seating himself at his table. "Carry on, please."

The Sergeant, who had been standing stiffly at "Attention," relaxed slightly, and placed some papers before the Captain, who was officially known as the Officer Commanding the Depot. A word or two followed which did not reach John's ears, and then he heard his name called out in the Sergeant's full, round, parade tones.

The Captain looked pleasantly, but keenly, at the recruit, noting with satisfaction the broad shoulders, clear skin and steady, grey eyes.

"Well, my lad," he said; "you look pretty useful. I see the doctor has passed you Class 'A.' Sergeant, the Bible."

The Sergeant gave him the Book, and he rose and, handing it to John, reverently repeated the words of the solemn oath by which

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John pledged himself loyally to defend his King "and his heirs and successors" for ever.

"Now, Martin," resumed the officer, when John had pressed the Book to his lips, with the inward determination to be true to the oath he had taken while there was life in his body; "I've had a note from your late Chief about you, and I like what he says. You'll find military life a great change, remember, but I think you'll be sensible enough to accommodate yourself to your new surroundings. The best advice I can give you is to do as you're told without arguing. Lots of things are said and done in the Army which seem to be all d—— nonsense to the civilian, but as time goes on you'll find out the reasons for them. The rules and regulations are all based on years of experience, and if you do your duty by the Army you'll find it'll do its duty by you. I'm telling you this because you're a man of education and intelligence. Some people think the Army's a sort of glorified convict establishment: it's not. It's got no use for criminals. What it wants is smart, keen men, who can realise that discipline doesn't mean slavery. In a certain Army we know of the motto is "Blind Obedi-

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ence." In ours it's "Live Intelligence." Now you'd better see about your kit. Good luck to you."

A pleasant nod of dismissal terminated the soldierly little speech, and John found himself following one of the smart orderlies across the parade-ground to the Regimental Stores.

"Feel a bit strange?" said his guide, cheerfully.

"A bit," answered John.

"Ah, you'll soon get over that," replied the clerk, with the wisdom of a veteran of six months' service. "Great thing is: when you get an order, *jump to it!* And keep your buttons clean," he added, with an excellent imitation of the Sergeant's official manner.

The Stores proved to be a large building wherein a calm Quartermaster-Sergeant and a dispassionate Staff guarded piles of uniforms, belts, kit-bags and articles of equipment of which John did not even know the names, to say nothing of such flotsam and jetsam as knives, forks, spoons, razors, hair-brushes, dubbin and needles and cotton.

Duly presented to the Q.M.S. by the orderly (who had suddenly changed his war-worn

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air for one of respectful admiration—he was hoping for a new pair of boots himself), John found himself appraised by an eye which calculated in a flash his chest measurement, head circumference and the size of his feet. Then, after a rapid fitting (in which the Q.M.S.'s judgment proved astonishingly accurate) a sort of chant began, the Q.M.S. taking the solo, and a myrmidon at the table, writing busily, supplying a chorus of "Right, sir," as he entered the items on a form.

"Jackets, Service Dress, two"; proceeds the ritual; "Trousers, ditto, two; cap, ditto, one; Great-coat, drab, one; titles, shoulder, six; badges, cap, one; knives, clasp, one——" and so on, until a pile of goods has accumulated that makes the recruit wonder whether a motor lorry will be allowed him to take it away in. The unfamiliar official nomenclature confuses him; in later days he will become acquainted with the classic "Stores" joke about the issue of "Mallets, woodenheaded, Soldiers', two," wherein the omission of a comma makes all the difference.

One of the Quartermaster-Sergeant's aides-de-camp, a friendly fellow, packs the stuff to-

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gether and helps John to convey it to the barrack-gate—for he has been told to go home and report again, uniformed and ready for training, the next morning.

Curiously enough, their way lies past the canteen, which the storeman innocently points out. John, being wise in his generation, proposes that they go in and see what time of day it is, and they hob-nob with much good fellowship, until the storeman, horrified at the flight of time, stops in the middle of a summarised version of "The Compleat Art of Soldering" which he has been delivering for the "cruitie's" benefit.

"The Quarter-bloke'll be on my track," he says. "So long, matey; don't be late to-morrow. Cheerio!"

And John goes home to display to his admiring family his newly-acquired trappings of war, and incidentally to wrap his puttees around neighbouring pieces of furniture in the effort to persuade the snake-like swathings to encircle his shapely calves.

Chapter III

The war brought with it many changes, both great and small—among the latter being the transformation of John Edward Martin, sometime civilian draughtsman, into No. 12,345 Private Martin, J.E., of the 18th (Training Reserve) Battalion, Loyal Clayshire Regiment. Yet not such a small thing, perhaps, after all, for it meant the cheerful offering of a man's life for the cause of his country. The widow's mites were accounted to her for much.

So John departed from his home-place and went to live in the company of fourteen hundred other men-at-arms in a large camp situated in what is officially described as a "suitable training ground." This phrase meant that it was:

- (a) Healthy;
- (b) Surrounded by country well provided with prickly bushes, muddy ditches, steep hills and other features which

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add to the gaiety of those indulging in mimic warfare; and

- (c) Seven good miles from the distractions of the nearest town.

In this sylvan retreat John made his first acquaintance with hutments. The word "hutment" had vaguely suggested to his mind something between a Kaffir *kraal* and a hotel; he discovered it to mean a wooden building about eighty feet long by thirty feet broad, raised a few feet from the ground by concrete pillars, with a door at each end approached by a short flight of steps, and presenting rather the appearance of Noah's Ark after the subsidence of the waters had made the boat part a superfluity. In point of fact, though its architecture was severe, its interior was distinctly comfortable. In the middle stood a stove, which provided a grateful warmth in the cold evenings. Down the centre of the room long tables, scrubbed to a dazzling whiteness, were placed, with benches on each side. The walls were fitted with shelves, rifle-racks and pegs for equipment (by the Government) and war-maps and pictures of pretty *danseuses* (by the occupants). The latter

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mysteriously disappeared on inspection days. The couches whereon the occupants slept the sleep of men who have learned what it means to be really tired, consisted of three springy planks (known as "bed-boards") supported on little trestles; a straw-filled mattress and pillow; and certain blankets, soft and excellent warm. These things, and many more, John learned during his first day in camp, through the kindness of the Hut Orderly of the mansion to which he had been assigned. The Orderly was also kind enough to allow John to polish the stove, clean the windows and perform a few other trifling services, which, as he pointed out, "he might as well learn to do against his turn came for ord'ly juty." John polished with vigour, and was rewarded by being instructed in the art of cleaning five tunic-buttons at the same time, and the value of dubbin for rendering new Army boots pliant and easy to the feet.

The next day John made his first acquaintance with the "square." It was not really a square, but recruits' drill on the parade-ground is religiously referred to as "going on the square" from old tradition. First, of

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course, his blankets had to be folded and his mattress rolled according to an exact pattern, and his sleeping place made as tidy as though it had never been slept in—the Corporal in charge of his hut saw to that.

Then John and some dozen other gentlemen, whose creased clothing and squeaky boots savoured of the recruit a league off, were handed over to the charge of a smart Sergeant, who eyed them dispassionately and explained, without emotion, that, whatever they had been before (sniff), he intended to make them into soldiers fit to belong to the finest regiment of the finest fighting force in the world—i.e., the Loyal Clayshire Regiment of the British Army. Without more ado he ranged them in line (“like real soldiers,” he remarked) and proceeded to instruct them in the mysteries of squad drill. For many days thereafter, with intervals for breakfast (jolly good bacon) and dinner (meat-and-two-veg. and sometimes pudding), John doggedly devoted himself to the mastery of his muscles, learning how to stand straight up and to look to his front though the Heavens fell or a real General passed by; how to salute without knocking his

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cap off; to answer questions without moving his hands as well as his tongue; and to turn about on the march without leaning over like a crack cyclist going round a corner. He learned many other interesting and important things: such as that if every alternate man takes a pace to the rear with the left foot and a pace to the right with the right foot and stands steady ("Smartly now, at the word of command!") neat little lines of four men each will result; also that the apparently insane antics indulged in by men undergoing physical training are really carefully-thought-out exercises each of which has been cunningly devised to amuse and encourage a particular set of muscles. These and many other things did John learn, and as the days grew into weeks his perseverance was rewarded by the issue of a real rifle and bayonet, and preliminary instruction in the use and care of those weapons. In public John maintained an outward calm, but in his rare moments of privacy he regarded his Lee-Enfield with pride-dimmed eyes, and whispered to himself: "I'm a *soldier!*"

Chapter IV

It was a Great Day in John's career when he was released from the bondage of the recruits' squad and permitted to join his Platoon.

To descend for a moment to what has been aptly described as "the filthy, but necessary technicality," it should be explained that the modern regiment of British infantry is composed of a number of Battalions, each about a thousand humans strong. A Battalion is divided into four Companies, and a Company into four Platoons. As a matter of fact, the Platoon is itself divided into four Sections, but that is, so to speak, its own affair; the Platoon is a sort of little family all to itself, and yet in no way detached from the parental care of its Company or the godlike guidance of its Battalion. The art of preserving cohesion without destroying individuality is one in which the British military authorities have attained an extraordinary degree of success, of which the best proof is the wonderful initia-

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tive shown by subordinate leaders, and even by individual private soldiers, in circumstances of the greatest difficulty and danger.

Each Platoon is commanded by a subaltern officer, who has to assist him a Platoon Sergeant and a number of junior non-commissioned officers. In each Platoon certain men are instructed in special duties, such as bombing, scouting, etc.; but apart from this every soldier receives a thorough grounding in the general science of warfare.

One fine morning Private John Edward Martin found himself standing, very erect, in the ranks of No. 2 Platoon, "A" Company, with his bayonet fixed, awaiting inspection by Second Lieutenant Bartley, who commanded the Platoon. Mr. Bartley was a tall, fair young man, with a humorous mouth carefully compressed into the rigid lines demanded by his high position. His belt was very shiny and his gloves were very new, but Mr. Bartley was no raw hand. He had "done his bit" in the ranks before His Majesty had conferred upon his trusty and well beloved Thomas Bartley the honour of an Officer's Commission, and Thomas knew exactly how long it took to clean

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a rifle properly, and on which side of the bayonet-scabard the entrenching-tool handle should be strapped.

The Platoon respected him accordingly.

John had spent hours in preparation for this inspection and was rewarded by the approval of his commander.

"Ah," said Mr. Bartley to his Platoon Sergeant, stopping in front of John; "another addition to our family?"

"Yes, sir," replied the Sergeant, smartly; "No. 12,345, Private Martin, J.E., passed from recruits' squad yesterday, sir."

"Very good. Now, Martin, this is your first inspection so I'm going to tell you something: when I was in the ranks, our crowd was inspected by a famous General. When he'd looked at every badge and button—and he'd take in a man's whole equipment in about half a glance—he said: 'Lads, remember that the biggest dandy makes the best soldier!' What he meant was that the man who takes a pride in himself, and keeps himself smart whether he's on parade or square-pushing round the town—that man's going to be the fellow you can rely on when the bother happens. I've

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seen it scores of times myself since then. Cleaning buttons may seem all damn nonsense to a man who's come out to fight for his country, but it's not! It's just one of the little things that help to make up the big things—and the big thing'll come along fast enough, don't you worry!"

With a pleasant smile—for Mr. Bartley was not too "big" to smile at his men—he passed on, leaving John with the very proper resolve to become the smartest soldier in the smartest etc., etc.

Chapter V

"But father," protested the youth, "accidents will happen in the best regulated families."

"I would have you to know, sir," thundered his irate parent, "that this is *not* one of the best regulated families!"

John's company was excellently regulated and things frequently went wrong in it, as they do in every company whose members are keen enough to make mistakes. Up till the time of going to press, John had never been "on the carpet"—that is, he had merely received the customary chokings off which travel downwards from Field-Marshal to bugler. But Nemesis has been taking cover in a neighbouring dug-out, and now, adjusting the backsight, holding the breath, and exercising a steady pressure diagonally across the small of the butt, loosed off, and brought down John Martin at the first shot. In language savouring less of camouflage, John was "for it"—warned

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to appear before his Company Commander at Company Orderly Room, and there plead in defence of the charge that he, No. 12,345, Private Martin, J.E., did appear upon parade with his rifle in a dirty condition, thereby (though Army Form B.250 did not say so) rendering himself an object of disgust and loathing to all right-minded officers, non-commissioned officers and men, including his Platoon Sergeant.

John sat upon his bed-place and polished his buttons reflectively: that is, he brushed at the brass till it reflected the morning sun, and at the same time he reflected gloomily upon his position.

To the good soldier his conduct sheet is the shield which no foul blot must be allowed to sully. John's sheet had hitherto preserved the virgin whiteness of a blameless life, and now—despite his efforts to avoid reproach, his dogged attention to duty, his surreptitious study of the Red Book—he was to be haled before the *cadi* like a common criminal and metaphorically branded before the face of all men. John felt that he was eating the bread of adversity and drinking the waters of affliction;

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in other words, that this was very hard cheese indeed.

John had been trained to realise that his rifle is the soldier's best friend, and had been shown how to care for it. He prided himself on keeping it always in perfect condition, butt, barrel and bore. Yet, when the rifles of his Platoon were inspected, the barrel of his trusty weapon was discovered to be in such a state as (to quote the official himself) to make an armourer-sergeant spit blood.

"How, then . . . ?" queries the intelligent reader. (As a matter of fact, the I.R. probably remarked: "Then how the ——?" but that is not *comme il faut* for a respectable book.)

The explanation is a simple one.

In the same hut with John there lived one Pratt, a simple soul and kindly, but with a memory best described upon a "Nil" return. Everybody liked Pratt except the unhappy N.C.O. in charge of the room, and even he hated him only officially.

Pratt was always in hot water. If his accoutrements were clean he was late on parade; if he arrived ten minutes before everybody else

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(having mistaken the time) his boots were sure to be dirty. On the occasion of John's undoing Mr. Pratt had been seized with a sudden panic, and, snatching up John's rifle in mistake for his own, had fled to the as yet deserted parade-ground. John, who slept beside Pratt, finding one rifle instead of two in the rack between their beds, had innocently picked it up and chucklingly followed his room-mate in due time to the scene of his own subsequent slaughter.

Of course, the obvious thing was to explain the matter to the Company Commander, who, knowing the genial Pratt, would readily accept John's statement. But then—— After all, Pratt was not a bad fellow, and he had been in trouble so often that he was more than likely to get it in the neck if he came up again. Whereas John bore a good name. Of course, having a dirty rifle is not a capital crime, and the Captain might caution him or give him one day's confinement to barracks. But then he might decide to make an example of John, for dirty rifles were his pet aversion, and, as anything over one day's C.B. is a Company

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entry, bang would go the virgin whiteness of that nice, new conduct sheet.

"Look alive, Martin; you're for Orderly Room!"

The Orderly Corporal's shout broke into John's meditations, and, hastily springing up, he began to button up for the ordeal.

Outside the Orderly Room he fell into line, with half a dozen gentlemen distinguished from their fellows by their lack of belts. There was a pause, during which the amateur criminals stood "at ease" uneasily, and wondered where their stomachs had gone to. Then John found himself the centre of an ingenious manœuvre by which a belted and capped soldier stood on one side of him and his Platoon Sergeant on the other. Somebody snatched his hat from his head, the Company Sergeant-Major appeared and shouted, "Escort an' prisoner. 'Shun! Left Turn! Quick March! . . . Haault! Right Turn! Private Martin, sir!"

Recovering consciousness to some extent, John found himself in the bare, grim-looking room wherein the Company Commander dealt with high affairs of State. He was a keen-

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looking man, whose left breast bore a ribbon that is not given lightly. Near him was John's Platoon officer, and there were other people dimly in the middle distance, but John's interest was riveted by the quiet, somewhat tired-looking man who sat at the table and who held in his hand the charge sheet whereon John's offence was set forth.

"No. 12,345, Private Martin, J.E.," said the Captain. "You are charged with showing a dirty rifle at inspection parade on the 10th instant. Sergeant Miller."

"Sir," said the Platoon Sergeant, so suddenly that John nearly jumped. The Sergeant proceeded to describe in brief but telling phrases the condition of the rifle. Having done so, he stopped; it was no part of his duty to offer opinions.

"Anything to say, Martin?"

"No, sir," replied John, with a sudden resolution. "Sorry, sir," he added, in response to a nudge from behind and a whisper which, to his amazement, appeared to proceed from the Sergeant Major, whose face, however, remained absolutely expressionless to all beholders.

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The Captain thought for a moment. "What is this man's character?" he asked the Platoon Commander.

"Excellent, sir," Mr. Bartley answered. "He is a new hand, but he's keen and tries to learn, and his behaviour is very good."

At this point the door opened cautiously and the Orderly Corporal appeared, looking appealingly at the Sergeant Major. That worthy bent his august head, the Corporal whispered.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the S.M.; "further evidence volunteered."

The Captain nodded permission and the Orderly Corporal giving an excellent imitation of the Sergeant-Major's parade voice marched in the agitated Mr. Pratt, who plunged without more ado into a rambling statement from which it appeared that, having been on fatigue duty in the cook-house, he had only just heard of the charge, and realising what must have happened had come to tell the Captain all about it, and, and, and——

And that would do, said the Captain; and the charge was dismissed and everybody was

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to go away except Private Martin. And subsequently, to Martin:

"Martin, some people would call you a damn fool. Well, I like damn fools of your sort. I shall keep my eye on you. Now cut along to parade."

John cut.

Chapter VI

It was a bright, clear morning, and the men sang blithely as they tramped along on their way to the butts. The Company had been "struck off duties" for musketry; that is, they had reached the pleasantest stage of instruction in the science of musketry—that of firing on the big range. John had found the preliminary stages interesting enough, for his instructors were past masters in the art of translating technicalities into simple phrases, and making the recruit realise the difference between the cast-iron system of blind obedience and the British method of live intelligence.

He had learned to fall easily into attitudes which gave him the most perfect command of his weapon; to take cover quickly;—to judge with some accuracy his distance from the target he proposed to fire at; to load and fire (with dummy cartridges) at a speed he would previously have thought impossible. He had discovered with surprise that if a man will

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only remain absolutely motionless, it is almost impossible to detect him at a few hundred yards' distance, and that quite a little sound, such as the creaking of a bayonet frog or the click of a rifle against a bayonet scabbard, can be heard at a surprising distance on a still night. Also, he had put on some very fair scores on the miniature range.

But now he was to learn something new about his rifle; he was to find out how it would behave with a real, live, deadly-looking cartridge in its breach.

"Ye'll unnerstan'," said the Musketry Sergeant-instructor, who had eaten many a haggis in his time; "ye'll unnerstan' that nae two rifles are the same. They may *look* it, but they're as different as whiskey an' beer when ye come tae loose them off."

John pondered this saying in his thoughtful way as he marched along, and remembered that he had often seen two complicated pieces of machinery, built from the same plans and by the same hands behave quite differently when they were set to work.

He was roused to consciousness of his surroundings by the worthy Pratt, who had been

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his devoted slave ever since the episode of the Orderly Room described in an earlier chapter, which it is to be hoped you did not skip, for it is a powerful piece of descriptive writing, and the subject of a battle with the publisher, who considered it much too long.

"Sing up, old sport," said Pratt, so John joined cheerily in the chorus of:

"Wash me in the water
Which you wash your lovely daughter in,
And I shall be whiter than
The milk in cocoa-nuts!"

It was a musical company, and the classics were not despised at smoking concerts, but for the open road the dear old ballads of the homeland (as above) were preferred, as being easier to march to than Chopin.

An hour's foot-slogging brought them to the range. There was a moderately strong wind blowing, but it was steady and wise men began mentally to rehearse the little table which gives the correct distance to "aim off" according to circumstances; thus, if the wind is blowing from your right, you must aim to the right,

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so as to allow for the deflection of your bullet while travelling towards the target.

"Q. E. D.—quite easily done," as Pratt said; but it is not so easy as it sounds, and requires very careful judgment.

A fatigue party from another company had been supplied for the butts—patching the targets, indicating the positions of the hits, and generally valeting the firing party.

Squads having been told off and ammunition served out, John found himself lying on a waterproof sheet, rifle in hand, his heart beating a little faster than usual. Beside him squatted a non-commissioned officer, who whiled away the time by reminding him to "hang on to the gun like grim death" and to keep his eye on the "bull" instead of on the foresight.

The bell of the field telephone rang sharply, sending a little thrill along John's nerves.

"Hullo?" It was the officer at the firing point replying to the officer in charge of the butts.

"All ready? Thanks. Then, carry on, please."

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A breathless pause, then the targets, lifted by unseen machinery, rose slowly into view.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

A jar against his shoulder and a sudden jump of his foresight told John that one of the whiplike reports had come from his own rifle, for his gradual pressure of the trigger had been almost unconscious.

Another breathless pause, a long pointer creeping up his target, and the instructor's voice beside him: "Very good, Martin, for a first shot. Just on the 'inner' line, at seven o'clock. Keep it up, my lad, and don't get flurried. There's plenty of time."

Starting at two hundred yards, the squads gradually increased their distance, until the afternoon found them gazing over six hundred yards of wind-swept, thistly ground at targets that seemed to have suddenly dwindled to pin-heads, although they were really as big as a tall man.

John had been firing steadily and had quickly become accustomed to the shock of discharge, and his instructor's notebook showed a respectable number of points to his credit.

"Now," said that worthy, as John threw

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himself prone on the roughly-levelled "six-hundred" firing-point; "now you've got to be careful. This isn't no point-blank business. Shove your sights up and remember the wind's going to tell a lot at this distance."

John moved his backsight to six hundred, took up his clip of five cartridges and forced them into the magazine with a deft movement of thumb and forefinger. Cuddling the butt against his cheek, he sighted at three o'clock, instead of six, to allow for the wind, lowered his foresight to half-past four, and fired.

"Inner—two o'clock," said the instructor, lowering his glasses. "Careful now, lad."

Another holding of the breath, another steady pressure of the trigger, another sharp crack.

"Inner—four o'clock, and closer to the bull."

Out of the tail of his eye John noticed, standing near, the Company Commander, Mr. Bartley, and other august personages. Heavens! To fail before their very eyes!

Crack!

A dead silence (for he had fired last of the
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squad). He had missed. He felt it in his bones. Then the instructor's quiet tones:

"Bull!"

"Well done," said Mr. Bartley. "Keep cool, now."

Crack! once more, and—rapture of raptures—"Bull!" again.

Still one more shot.

A long, anxious look over the sights; once more the gentle—oh, so gentle—squeeze of thumb and forefinger.

"Bull!"

"Very good shoot," says the Company Commander, and John rises, trying to keep the buttons from bursting off the tunic that covers a breast expanded a good three inches beyond its normal measurement.

Chapter VII

Olympian Jove was doubtless something of a swell in his way, but his statue in the Hall of Fame must (it seemed to Martin) dwindle into insignificance beside that of the Officer Commanding the Nth Battalion of the Loyal Clayshire Regiment. It was not merely his power to send a man into durance vile for twenty and eight days; nor the fact that he was the only person in the battalion who stood at the salute while the band played the National Anthem at Church parade; these things were impressive but not superlative. No, it was the astounding omniscience of the man—the incredible knowledge stored in the cells of his brain. Like the rustics in Goldsmith's poem:

“ . . . still they gazed, and still the wonder grew
That one small head could carry all he knew!”

Lieutenant-Colonel the Honourable Robert Sean-Thynges was a Regular Officer who had been “shot up considerable” in the South Afri-

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can war, and could not pass for active service again. If his body was not quite sound, however, his mind certainly was, and he had added to wide personal experience a wonderful accumulation of theoretical knowledge. Officers and rankers alike were encouraged to come to him for instruction—and got it. He had a disconcerting habit of turning up in odd places at unexpected moments. A perspiring student of Morse, making impossible motions, would find his flag snatched from him and the august C.O. himself sending a message at a rate calculated to startle the receiving station into sudden activity. The N.C.O. in charge of the miniature-rifle range, clearing up when the last firing squad had left, would hear a quiet request for a rifle and a few cartridges (“to keep my hand in, Corporal”) and would subsequently exhibit a card with the bull shot clean out, to an admiring crowd in the Canteen.

The Colonel not only realised the importance of encouraging initiative in those under his Command; he knew how to do it, too. He encouraged his subordinate commanders to devise and carry out tactical schemes, which

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were interesting and instructive to the participants, and enabled him to estimate the capabilities of those whom it was his duty to train.

Their Captain having obtained the necessary permission, "A" Company marched gaily out one fine morning for a "field day." This was a very popular amusement. A company would be sent off, like a little Army, to fight complicated battles of its own invention in which even the junior non-commissioned officers were afforded opportunities of showing their resource. Often, during the progress of one of these "stunts," the clatter of hoofs would be heard, and the C.O. would suddenly emerge from a wood from which he had been watching with keen appreciation the proceedings of attackers or defenders.

"A" Company were in great spirits. The Sergeants marched with the air of men from whom no secrets were hid; the Corporals imitated the Sergeants; the Lance-Corporals carried a special variety of "swank" peculiar to the junior non-com, and attainable by no other human being.

The hard country road echoed cheerily the rhythmic beats of the men's footsteps. The

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Company was marching "At Ease," rifles slung to the shoulder, caps pushed back and the neck-hooks of their jackets unfastened. The fresh morning air, and the sense of freedom produced by the knowledge that for a whole day they need not keep one ear open for the parade-bugle, made them feel like knights setting forth upon the High Adventures of the Holy Grail. The Grailers, one understands, were more than a little vague as to the exact nature of their objective—perhaps because the science of topography was still in its infancy in those days. But, after all, the adventure was the thing, and that was what the men of "A" Company felt. The Captain knew what he was going to do, and they were already sufficiently good soldiers to "trust the officer," with the pleasant consciousness that in due time he would explain to them the why, the where and the wherefore, and they would then apply their carefully trained intelligence to the carrying out of his plans.

Meanwhile, there was plenty to think about. A properly-trained company should never feel dull on a route-march; it is the old story of "Eyes" and "No Eyes," which John remem-

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bered reading at his first school. A leafy lane suggested the possibilities of an ambushade, duly guarded against by "Point" (a small advanced party) and "Flankers" (men who prowl cautiously on each side of a body of moving troops). A large, rambling farmhouse was opportunely reached just when the Captain (wily soul) deemed it wise to halt for a breath and the farmer—a sturdy patriot—begged leave to make offering of new milk, home-made cake and apples to all who would partake.

"But there's a couple of hundred of us!" protested the Captain.

"Ye'd be welcome if ye were double the number," answered the old fellow, heartily. "My own boy's in France, doin' his bit, God bless him, and—— Here, Mother, you an' Mary look to the lads, an' you, sir, step in and taste my brew in the parlour, will ye? It's honest, sound stuff, I'll warrant ye."

But this, with apologies, the Captain declined. He was not the man to take anything his men could not have, and alcohol was forbidden during hours of duty.

So down they all sat by the roadside, and

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Mary, with many blushes, helped her mother to serve out the rich, new milk, and soon overcame her shyness sufficiently to engage in cheerful badinage with certain personable young fellows, an encounter in which khaki, to its surprise, had not altogether the best of it.

"Fall in!"

Equipment is adjusted and ranks formed with the celerity of habit, and before the Captain blows his whistle and gives the signal to advance, he leads a rousing cheer for the kindly folk who received them so hospitably, and who are immensely gratified at the attention.

Away again, with an easy, mile-devouring stride, till at last the broad high road is forsaken for a little path which presently loses itself in a great stretch of common-land, with plenty of hedges and ditches, hills and vales—excellent country for field operations.

Here another halt is called, but this time it is for a solemn pow-wow. The Captain gathers around him his Second-in-Command, his four Platoon Commanders, his Company-Sergeant-Major and the senior non-commissioned officers of the Company (a Company-

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Sergeant-Major is a Second-Class Warrant Officer and a fearful swell!).

After some consideration and a careful study of a rough, but sufficiently accurate, sketch-map of the district, which the Company Commander had made a day or two before, the conference broke up, and the men, who had thrown themselves on the ground for a few minutes' rest and smoke while their leaders settled the plan of campaign, clustered eagerly round their respective Platoon Commanders to learn the result. In days of old, when knights were bold, as the song says, the commander considered it unnecessary—and, indeed, worse than useless—to tell his men-at-arms anything about his plans. Nowadays, however, it is recognised that the private soldier, however highly-trained a machine, is not *merely* a machine. Before he is asked to take part in an operation, the nature and extent of that operation is explained to him, so that in the event of his commander falling, every man knows exactly what to do and how best to do it.

It had been decided that Nos. 3 and 4 Platoons should be allowed to vanish into the dim and misty Unknown, return, and attack a posi-

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tion held by Platoons 1 and 2, the latter under the Company Commander and the attackers directed by the Junior Captain.

The attackers, officially described in the subsequent report submitted for the Colonel's perusal as "Force A," departed cheerfully, predicting an overwhelming success in a very brief time—in other words, they promised to "put the kybosh" on "Force B" (the defenders) in something less than a pig's whisper, or one jiffy.

The Captain posted scouts and disposed the rest of his force in a strong position, lit his pipe, and sat down to await news of the attack.

John, who had been detailed as a scout, felt a pleasant sense of responsibility as he departed with what he felt to be an excellent imitation of the catlike tread of one of Fenimore Cooper's Red Indians. The first thing, he decided, was to make himself thoroughly acquainted with the ground. He did so, by the simple process of falling headlong into a narrow ravine which had become so overgrown with furze bushes that but for his accident he would not have suspected its existence. He picked himself up, removed a few hundred

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prickles from his face and hands, and thought matters over. The result of his cogitations was a visit to Mr. Bartley. That astute gentleman straightway conveyed him to the Captain, who listened attentively to John's report, pulled at his pipe, and permitted himself a quiet chuckle.

In due course Platoons 1 and 2 appeared, proceeding with much caution. Finding, however, the defenders retiring before him in apparent confusion, the Second-in-Command determined on a bold stroke. Hastily bringing up his supports, he delivered an attack in force. Fatal manœuvre! Just as victory seemed within his grasp, No. 2 Platoon leaped from their cover in John's ravine and fell upon his flank and rear with an appalling shout.

Waterloo was not in it.

At the subsequent pow-wow, the Captain, summing up the operations said the defenders victory was largely due to the (1) observation and (2) intelligence of one of their scouts, Private Martin, of No. 2 Platoon.

John wrote a letter that evening. The first word on the envelope was "Miss."

Chapter VIII

"Fall in, men for leave!"

The Company Orderly Corporal had no need to shout twice. John, with buttons of gold and boots like the Ethiopian's visage, restrained a desire to sing as he received his pass and railway voucher. Pratt and he had four days' leave, and that simple soul entertained our young soldier with much cheerful conversation as they trudged to the railway station at Bigtown. Pratt had been a clerk in a wholesale warehouse before taking the preliminary steps (as he felt) towards the wielding of a Field-Marshal's baton, and had been much attracted by the doctrines of the Socialists. In former days he would have laughed to scorn the idea of military service, but the great cause of Right versus Might has drawn its supporters from the ranks of Labour and Capital, Plutocracy and Socialism alike.

"You see, Martin," said Pratt, as they stepped out at a good swinging pace; "you see,

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that sort o' thing was all right in *them* days. But it ain't no use now. We got to fight, see? Got to show the Germans they can't bloomin' well grab whatever they like without so much as askin' for it."

"But I thought," said John, "that you were a Socialist?"

"So I was, an' so I *am*. Don't you make no mistake."

"But you're a soldier now."

"Cert'n'ly. Why not? What you don't seem to understand is that a Socialist is a *man*, just the same as any one else, an' sometimes a bit better. Of course, mark you, there's some that's *not* men—whitelivered curs, they are, just like some in other parties. But you don't want to include them in *our* mob. The true Socialist is a man who wants to see fair play, see? Fair play. Proper show for every one. No slums. Decent homes for the kids, see?"

"Why are we at war?" proceeded Private Pratt, warming to his work, with pleasant recollections of former Saturday evening meetings arranged for the purpose of straightening out the trifling tangles still existing in this wonderful world of ours. "Why are we at

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war? Because the law has been broke. How? I answer you: by a set of blasted swine who wanted more power than was good for them, and tried to get it by murdering women and children. I say *murdering!* Yes. What about Belgium? See? This ain't War, really: it's killin' a mad dog. When that's done we'll take a spell, and settle up our troubles in no time. Parties are parties, an' they slang one another all round, but what's the odds? When Mr. Wilhelm Hohenzollern got tired of trying to conquer the world by thieving and spying, he tried to do it by force. Well? Now we *know* what he is, an' what his talk about brotherly love is worth. We've just got to smash him into little pieces, an' give the decent people in his own country a chance to live in quiet an' freedom, same as we do. Then we'll all have a great pow-wow an' settle up our own little differences. That's the sort of Socialist I am, John!"

"And a jolly good one," said John, heartily. "I wish there were more like you."

"There *are*," answered Pratt. "You hear people talk all sorts of tripe about revolutions an' that: don't you listen to it. I tell you the

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real MAN—I don't care whether he's English or Irish or Scotch or Welsh, aye, or French or American either, for that matter—the real MAN is out to get a decent, quiet, honest life, an' he's going to do it. See? It's only to *understand* one another, we want—an' we'll do that all the better after this bloody war is over.

"Don't think," he added, with sudden diffidence, "that this is all *my* idea. Clever blokes have thought of it, an' I've learnt about it from them. But that don't matter; the thing is, that it's true!"

"Jove, Pratt," answered John, thoughtfully, "I believe you're right."

"I'm sure of it," replied his friend, as the train rolled into the station.

* * * * *

Puff away, you great big engine! Pile on the coal, stoker! Blow your whistle, guard! You are taking Private John Edward Martin to the most important station on your line—the station called Home.

Gather up your traps, John. Look in the little glass over the seat, between the advertisements of Glorious Devon and the English

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Riviera, and make sure that your cap is on straight. Buckle on your belt, sling your haversack jauntily over the right shoulder. Where's your swagger cane? All right? Now, then! Here we are at last!

"John, my dear boy!"

"Mother!"

(Never mind the lump in your throat, John. There's no shame in being fond of your mother, God bless her.)

"Well, John; you've filled out, my boy. Welcome home."

"Thanks, Dad."

(The grip of the hand says more than the words, John. But stop—who's here?)

"How—how are you, John?"

"Why, Mary—you—well——"

"Your cousin Mary came to stay with me for a day or two, John. Aunt Annie knew I was—a little bit lonely."

"I'm *very* glad," says John. (And he is.)

Home now, with Mother on one side and Cousin Mary on the other (no cabs for Mother, with her soldier boy home to show to the world!) and Dad just a little uncertain where to walk, and finding it necessary to wipe his

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spectacles now and again. Those spectacles always *would* get dim on the slightest provocation.

What a tea! The home-made scones! ("Who made 'em?" says John. "Mary," says mother. "I'll have some more!"); the jam; the white table cloth; the hissing rashers and golden-and-white eggs; the cold meat and pickles; for Mother had arranged a composite meal consisting of all the things John particularly liked! Why say: "We have so-and-so; what would you like?" when one could say: "Behold rich and satisfying foods. Choose and eat, my son, as you will!"

It was a feast for Sybarites, "Not but what," says Honest John, "our prog is really jolly good. I've nothing to grumble at, at all, you know."

Then a great chat by the fireside and the giving of a full, true and particular account of the life of a soldier of His Majesty the King, by Private John Edward Martin, of the Loyal Clayshire Regiment.

At last Mother says, "Twelve? Gracious, John!" and retires. Mary follows, but remembers that the maid has a habit of leaving

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the kitchen gas on. John insists on accompanying her downstairs in case of mad mice or savage black beetles being about.

Then Dad knocks out his pipe and rises.

"John, my boy, you're a good son. I'm proud of you."

Before John turns in that night (the clean sheets almost frighten him at first) he is not ashamed to kneel down and thank his Maker, and ask him for courage and steadfastness in the fight that lies before him.

* * * * *

"Private Martin," calls the Orderly Corporal.

"Yes, Corporal?"

"Wanted in the Orderly Room."

"What's wrong? I'm not due back till eight to-night, you know, and it's only five."

"You cut along and you'll find out. Look sharp."

Somewhat nervously John gives his name to the Company Clerk, and presently finds himself before the Captain.

"Ah, Martin. Back in good time, I see. That's right. All well at home?"

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"Yes, thank you, sir," says John, wondering what will follow.

"Good. Now, Martin, I've had my eye on you for some time, and Mr. Bartley and your Platoon Sergeant speak well of you. So I've recommended you for a stripe. Be sensible, now, and keep your head. I want you to make a good N.C.O., and I think you will. You're young, from the point of view of service, but I think you'll do."

"I—I'll do my best, sir," stammers John, hardly knowing what he is saying.

"All right," answers the Captain, nodding pleasantly. "You'll appear in Battalion Orders to-morrow or next day.—Oh, by the way,"—as John salutes and turns to go—"just tell the Orderly Sergeant I've given you a message to take in to Bigtown, will you, and you can have the Orderly's bicycle. You can just get to the telegraph office before closing time if you look sharp!"

John stares, then reddens, grins, salutes and vanishes. He sends *two* telegrams that evening.

Chapter IX

The inventor of the term "Brass Hat" veils his identity under a modest anonymity, but so wide a popularity has the phrase achieved that it is probably unnecessary to explain that it describes any officer whose rank entitles him to wear gold oak-leaves upon the peak of his cap. Commencing with such lesser luminaries as Majors and Colonels of the General Staff, one ascends through Brigadier-Generals, Major-Generals, and Lieutenant-Generals, to the dizzy heights occupied by Generals and Field Marshals. It is interesting to note, *en passant*, that a Lieutenant-General is higher in rank than a Major-General, the reason being that in Cromwell's time the Protector appointed himself Captain-General of the Forces, and under his command he designated certain officers as Lieutenant-General and Sergeant-Major-General. In course of time, the "Sergeant" was omitted, and the rank became known simply as "Major-General."

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This valuable sidelight on history serves to introduce an important step in John Edward Martin's ascent of the military ladder.

Having suffered for some days from eye-strain consequent upon his attempts to look at the stripe on each arm at the same time, Lance-Corporal Martin settled down to his new duties with the quiet determination of a man who perceives in his Colonel merely another competitor to be distanced in the race for fame. Napoleon stated that every private soldier carried a Marshal's baton in his knapsack—which must have added an additional worry to the troops' burden on kit inspection days. In the British Army there is more than one distinguished General who commenced his military career with a rifle on the shoulder, that to-day bears the little golden crossed swords and crown.

Martin found that the position of a Lance-Corporal, though not exalted, is no sinecure. This was especially the case on days on which it fell to his lot to perform the duties of Company Orderly Corporal—a task usually performed by the Lance-Corporals in turn. Rising early in the morning (like the gentlemen

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in the opera), he proceeded to light a metaphorical fire under the more sleepy members of the company, and generally assist the Orderly Sergeant to get ready the first parade of the day. Parading the fatigue-men, he assisted at the issue of rations from the Quartermaster's stores and saw them delivered to the cooks. Sick men had to be paraded for medical inspection, and defaulters for appearance at Company Orderly Room; he was present at the issue of breakfast, and, indeed all meals; he acted as aide-de-camp to the Orderly Sergeant and was expected to carry in his head a complete programme of the day's arrangements. In addition to all this, he had himself to take part in any parades from which he was not specially excused for the purpose of performing some specific duty.

It was a busy life.

John was a level-headed fellow, and refrained from putting on "side," with the result that he soon established a quiet authority over the men with whom he had previously been on an equality.

There came a day when his Captain, after some conversation with the young N.C.O.,

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filled up the blue form which recommends a ranker for His Majesty's Commission, and at last, after a period of suspense, John was told to wait upon the Colonel at ten o'clock on the following morning.

"You know what that means, Corporal?" said Mr. Bartley. "The Colonel has been very kind, and is going to take you himself to be interviewed by the General. Don't get the wind up: clean up thoroughly, and answer smartly when they ask you anything."

So John cleaned up thoroughly, very thoroughly indeed. His hut-mates, with the good-fellowship of the soldier, took a deep interest in the proceedings. The Company-Sergeant-Major himself, terror of evildoers, unbent, sent for John, gave him good advice and revealed to him a deep secret connected with the polishing of buckles so that they would retain their brightness even in the rain.

The fatal day arrived, and John, with his heart making frantic efforts to burst his ribs, stood stiffly outside the Battalion Orderly Room, where a motor car was making noises indicative of a desire to start, "Champing 'is bloomin' bit," as its driver, who had been an

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Army Service Corps driver in former days, remarked.

The door opens, John's hand flies to his cap, and the Colonel says, cheerfully, "Ah, Martin, ready for the ordeal?"

"Yes, sir," answers John, wondering how it is that the C.O. *always* knows just how to put a man at his ease, and how he can manage to be colloquial without losing dignity.

The Colonel climbs into the car, the driver does things to the mechanism, and John is about to take his place beside him when the C.O. says: "No, no. Get in here."

So John sits down beside his Colonel, holding his cane between his knees and wondering what the "old man" can have to say to him. What the "old man" says to him need not be recorded. They were words fitting to be used by a gallant officer and gentleman to a young fellow in whom he divined the high spirit and good faith he loved, words which made John resolve never to tarnish the splendid record of the great Army to which he belonged.

The car stopped and the Colonel stopped too, got out, and entered the Brigade Headquarters. After a brief space John heard his

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name called, and was shown into a large room in which maps, reports and other documents were hung upon the walls and scattered about writing tables.

Seated at a desk was a grey-haired, elderly officer, whom John instinctively saluted as his Brigadier even before he noticed the crossed swords on his shoulder-straps and the row of medal-ribbons on his breast. Standing stiffly to "attention," John bore as well as he could the keen gaze bent upon him from beneath a pair of shaggy eyebrows.

"You are Lance-Corporal Martin?" said the General, after a pause.

"Yes, sir."

"Your name has been sent in to me as a suitable candidate for a Commission, and your Commanding Officer has spoken well of you. Do you realise the responsibility laid upon an officer?"

"I do, sir," answered John, seriously.

"Good. Some young men think an officer has a good time—does what he likes—is a sort of superior being, in fact. That's not so. An officer is a soldier, first, last and all the time. If he's not, he's no good to anybody. It's his

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business to set an example of sobriety, punctuality and good discipline to his men; to see to *their* comfort before he thinks of his own; and to show them that he knows his job. If his men know their officer can fire a rifle as well as talk about it, use a bayonet, throw a bomb—in fact, if they feel he's a real, live *soldier*, they'll follow him to hell! If not—but I'm thankful to say we don't breed the other sort. This war has shown that.

"Now, my lad, I'm not going to ask you a lot of questions. I've heard all I want to about you, and I've had a look at you. I'll send your name forward. When you get your Star, remember your days in the ranks, and treat your men as you like to be treated now. And always keep your eye on the man above you; he may go under, and you want to be able to fill his place if need be. Carry on."

He nodded pleasantly as John saluted, and turned to the Colonel.

John walked back to camp with the General's words ringing through his brain like a bugle-call. If he did not make a good officer, he resolved, well, it would not be *his* fault.

Chapter X

Hut No. 7 presented an animated appearance. By special permission of the Company Commander, certain of John's friends had arranged a farewell gathering—what Pratt described as a "G and F. O.," or gay and festive occasion. For John's papers had "gone through," in official slang; that is, he had been duly accepted as a candidate for a Commission and ordered to report himself to a Cadet Battalion for the course of training which would finally determine his fitness or unfitness for the Single Star of a Second Lieutenant.

The worthy Pratt had made the arrangements for the feast; that is to say, he had made himself a complete nuisance to everybody within his orbit, irrespective of rank, until Corporal Merritt, the N.C.O. in charge of No. 7, had in sheer pity fallen upon and morally obliterated him for a space, taking into his own capable hands the floating threads connected with the ardent Pratt's ambitious

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schemes. Recovering, Pratt cheerfully trotted round after him like a faithful terrier dog, cutting his hands on bully-beef tins, upsetting buckets of water, and generally driving all and sundry to distraction, with an alacrity and a fixed conviction that his services were invaluable, that disarmed the most irascible of his victims.

John himself had been far from realising how popular he had become. In his relations with officers and men, as recruit, trained soldier and non-commissioned officer, he had tried to bear himself modestly and courteously. He had received a quiet hint that Hut No. 7 would not be a comfortable abiding place for him during the afternoon (which was Saturday and a half holiday for the troops) and the pleasures of a country walk had been delicately indicated to him. As he strode along he communed with his spirit and balanced his social ledger. After careful consideration, he decided with satisfaction, that he might leave the Battalion feeling that no one could accuse him of having done him a bad turn, while many could thank him for a helping hand over

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one or other of the numberless stiles provided for the embarrassment of lame dogs.

Meanwhile, great activity prevailed in Hut No. 7. The mansion had been thoroughly scrubbed out that morning, not so much on account of the evening's entertainment as in consequence of the Commanding Officer's habit of holding a tiresome function known as "Kit and Barrack Inspection" on the last day of the week. However, on this occasion it was opportune. The bed-places and bedding were scientifically stacked at one end of the hut, in such a way as to take up as little room as possible. By dint of ingenious manœuvring an additional table (with its accompanying benches) was insinuated, and some planks and trestles offered insecure accommodation in one corner for a few extra guests.

Wild horses shall not induce the present writer (who was there) to reveal the intrigues by which such stern officials as the Quarter-master-Sergeant and the Sergeant-Cook were induced to lend their assistance to the preparations for this orgy. Suffice it that by their help, added to a generous contribution from

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the private stores of great-souled guests, a Gargantuan feast was prepared.

It was obviously impossible to invite the entire Company, so the committee (composed of Hut No. 7 *en bloc*) had recourse to a judicious scheme of selection. First, they invited themselves. (This vote was unanimous.) Then they invited the great people, such as the Company-Sergeant-Major, the Regimental Provost-Sergeant (on the principle of always keeping on good terms with the law), and the Company Storeman (a good friend in the matter of socks and boots).

Some of the guests would probably not attend, so the invitations would cost nothing and would at the same time gratify the recipients.

It was decided that certain good men and true should be bidden to the banquet itself; others, less intimate, but still stout fellows and merry men, should come in (like the children) at dessert; the *'oi polloi* being casually told to "roll round" during the evening and join in the choruses.

When John returned from his constitutional he was met, to his great embarrassment, by the committee, each member of whom formally

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shook him by the hand. This ceremony had been decided on after some discussion, the Corporal pointing out that on the occasion of a recent visit of inspection paid by a Royal Personage, the Colonel and officers had shaken hands with him, obviously as a mark of welcome and to put him at his ease.

Entering the hut, John's eyes fell upon an imposing spectacle. If the tables had been capable of speech they would have groaned under the weight of good things placed upon them. Cold meat and pickles, sardines, jam, pork and beans, pineapple chunks, home-made cake (opportunistically received that morning by Pratt), kippers (presented by the canteen staff), and a great apple-dumpling from the cooks—such a spread had not been seen within the memory of the oldest inhabitant.

The chair was taken by the Platoon Sergeant; it was a real chair, borrowed from the canteen for the occasion, and was ingeniously elevated on blocks a little above the floor. This lent an added dignity to the chairman, and incidentally made it exceedingly difficult for him to reach his food.

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The chairman's opening speech was short and to the point. He said:

"Friends—I won't call you 'gentlemen' because I know every one of you—we've met to wish good luck to a friend who's going up the ladder a step. We'll talk about that later on. Grub first, speeches afterwards. Carry on!"

They carried on.

When the committee had at last been persuaded to desist from their benevolent efforts to burst the guest of the evening, the debris was cleared away by willing helpers, the social glass and cheerful pipe were filled, the second class-passenger-guests began to arrive, and the multitude settled down to the business of the evening.

The chairman, in a speech lasting twenty-four minutes and seventeen seconds, gave a brief account of the life of a capable and conscientious Platoon Sergeant; explained the origin of the war and its progress to date, with some remarks on the more prominent leaders; dealt shortly with the political position; and remarked that they wished their friend Lance-Corporal Martin success in his new sphere. The audience then relieved their overcharged

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feelings by singing "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow!"

Private Pratt followed, amidst cries of "Fall in!" "Slope hipel!" and "Hurry up, Pratt; the bugle's gone!"

Mr. Pratt wished it to be understood that he knew a good man when he saw one. (A voice: No lookin' glass in *your* hut, old sport!) Never mind whether there was a lookin' glass or not; some people had better have a wash before *they* looked in one, anyhow. (Cries of "Order!") Very well, then. He knew what he was talking about, see? All right. What he had to say was that Martin was a *white* man, see? (Great applause.) Yes. A *white* man. . . . (Here Mr. Pratt turned and shook John warmly by the hand, and drank his health, amidst renewed cheering).

A deeper note in the confused acclamations gradually resolved itself into cries of "'Shun!" and the chairman dimly perceives, through a cloud of smoke which could almost be cut with a knife, the figures of some fresh guests, who turn out to be the Company-Sergeant-Major, Mr. Bartley, and—honour of honours—the Captain himself. These personages were ush-

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ered through the immensely gratified audience to the head of the table, where the chairman, pulling himself together, got ready for a great effort. The Captain, however, knew what to expect, and tactfully cut in before the barrage could start.

"Gentlemen," he said, his clear voice ringing out pleasantly, "you'll excuse me if I say what I've got to say without waiting for the usual ceremonies. Mr. Bartley and the Sergeant-Major and I have rather a big job on in the office and can't stay long, but we felt we must join you for a few minutes to-night. I'm not much of a speaker—(Voice from the furthest corner of the room: Except on parade!)—Well, yes! I believe I *do* get pretty fluent on parades, sometimes, but I think we understand one another, eh? (Cries of "Yes, sir!" "Not 'arf!") and an attempt to commence "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow!" suppressed by the Captain's uplifted hand and the efforts of the committee).

"What I want to say is this: I'm very glad to see you all here giving Martin a good send-off. He's a good chap—(cheers)—and we all wish him the best of luck. (Prolonged cheer-

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ing.) Now, one other word: this little affair has shown me very plainly how popular Martin is (don't blush, Martin!), and I'm glad of it. Why? Because Martin is the *right sort*. I'm not going to talk slops; you don't want that; but I want to tell you what I mean by 'the right sort': it's the sort of man who learns his job and does it; who's not ashamed to be keen and smart and proud of his corps. That's the sort of man who's made the British Army respected all over the world, and I don't mind telling you I'm proud to command a Company that can show men like him. That's all. I can't make speeches, but I've tried to tell you how we—I'm speaking for the officers and warrant officers—feel about it. Now I've got to go; have a good time, and don't forget I want the hut all shipshape by 'Lights Out.' Good night."

Amidst renewed cheering the Exalted Ones shook John's long-suffering hand and departed, and as the newspapers say, the remainder of the evening was passed in conversation, pleasantly interspersed with songs, speeches and recitations.

Chapter XI

CADET: One who serves in the army as a private to acquire skill and obtain a commission; a pupil in a military academy.

So says our old friend Mr. Nuttall, and upon the whole he is right. Modern warfare has become such a comprehensive science that to "acquire skill" in even one of its divisions means a great deal of hard work backed by intelligence and keenness. In the British Army blue blood is regarded as a less important qualification in an officer than brains. Commanding Officers, at home and abroad, are constantly on the look-out for smart men in the rank and file. These men are picked out and sent to training establishments where they are placed under the care of experts—men who know the last thing about the particular subject they teach. The schools vary in their arrangements and personnel according to the arm of the Service for which they train candidates; they are cavalry, infantry, artil-

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lery, machine gun, aviation, engineering and other centres, each having, of course, its special curriculum.

John had been appointed to No. 146B. Officer Cadet Battalion, which was stationed near London. Feeling very proud of the white band round his cap, which indicated his status as a Cadet he duly reported himself at the Orderly Room, and after a short interval was brought before the Commanding Officer. The interview was brief.

"I see," said the Colonel, "that you have already won a stripe. That's good. A Lance-Corporal has a difficult job, because he has to live amongst the men he commands. That teaches him tact and self-restraint. But that's beside the point. Now, about your work here. Of course, as a trained soldier, you know your drill and so on; well, you are going to be taught the same things—and others—from the point of view of the officer. Our routine is simple—it consists of work, more work, and then a lot more work. If you're keen, that won't frighten you. Stick to it, and don't be afraid to ask questions; we're here to tell you the answers."

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John found that his new surroundings differed little from those to which he had been accustomed, so far as accommodation was concerned. Having been posted to "C" Company, he was interviewed by the subaltern commanding No. 10 Platoon and handed over to the Company Orderly Sergeant, a friendly person who proceeded to give him sundry items of valuable information.

"You'll soon shake down," he said. "It's not much different from an ordinary Infantry Battalion, you know, except in the training. I mean, we have parades and all that as usual, only we do special 'stunts' and get a lot of lectures and things. They're very keen on lectures, and you'll find it a good thing to take plenty of notes. The exams are fairly stiff, but you'll pass 'em all right if you stick to it."

John had arrived at an opportune moment. The afternoon parade was over, and by the time he and his guide reached the hut to which he had been told off, tea was ready.

The Orderly Sergeant left John in the charge of the senior soldier in Hut No. 14, who greeted him pleasantly and introduced him to the inmates by the simple process of

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yelling: "I say, you fellows! This is Martin, joined from the Clayshires. He'll dig (live) here."

"Sit down, old thing," said a brawny youth. "Had tea? Right—Jenks, my nobleman, lend us your spare cup and things, will you?"

Jenks, aristocrat of crockery, readily produced the cup and things, and John was soon busily engaged in devouring bread and butter and sardines, with jam to follow.

Whether rations be plentiful or scarce, the soldier has always "a bit for a pal," and the stranger within his gates will be fed and cherished, though he himself go short.

The brawny youth already mentioned rejoiced in the name of Kirby-Hincks, and was naturally known as "Kinks" in consequence. He was a great friend of Jenks, and the pair were known even outside the Company as the "Kay-Jay Twins." Kinks stood six feet and an inch in his thinnest socks, and was modelled like a young Greek god. He had been regarded as one of the most promising athletes of his college at the 'Varsity when war broke out and called him and many another gallant youth to a sterner conflict. He enlisted dur-

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ing the August rush to the colours, and was one of the first of the "new men" to cross the Channel. There he picked up much useful knowledge, a bullet through the calf of his right leg, and the Military Medal. The wound was not serious enough to keep him from his regiment very long, and after some further service he was sent home to England and posted to a Cadet Battalion, bringing with him a recommendation from his C.O. that he would never have had the courage to present to his new chief if it had not been enclosed in a sealed envelope.

Jenks, a giant of five feet and the Recruiting Officer's view of three inches, was an amusing contrast to his big friend. He was chubby; there is no other word for it. To see him in his bath was to be irresistibly reminded of one of Botticelli's Zephyrs seen through a magnifying glass. He also had seen service in the trenches, where his unfailing cheeriness had made him a general favourite.

The Kay-Jays liked the look of Martin, which was no small compliment, for they were exclusive in their intimacies. After tea they took John round the camp, Kinks counsel-

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ling him wisely so that he might walk delicately in the sight of the Big Bugs, and Jenks acting as a sort of humorous Greek chorus.

"This is the Gym.," said Kinks, leading the way into a large, airy building in which half a dozen fellows, clad more easily than elegantly, were boxing, fencing and otherwise amusing themselves.

"From the Greek 'Gymnaza,'" commented Jenks, "to exercise naked, because the ancients wore no clothes during their games. An intelligent anticipation of days rapidly approaching, when, all the men in the world having gone to the war, there will be no tailors left to make clothes!"

Having looked in at the canteen, and the recreation room, where one might read, write or play chess, draughts or billiards, the three musketeers returned to "The Lodge," as Jenks called Hut No. 14, on the ground that they only lodged there for a space before folding their tents and stealing silently away, "like the Johnnies in Omar's battered caravanserai, don't you know," he added with cheerful inaccuracy.

Here they sat and smoked in much comfort

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and good fellowship until the last bugle and John learned something of the new life before him.

"There's one thing," remarked Kinks, "we don't get much 'fatigue' work: I mean, the ordinary dish-washing biz, you know."

"It's not that they spare our sensitive feelings," explained Jenks, "nor do they wish to save our lily-white hands from the contamination of the brush, scrubbing, soldiers'. They keep a certain number of men here for the domesticities, so to speak, so as to be able to sweat our souls out more thoroughly on tactics and 'sich'."

"I see," said John. "You can't get out of a field day in a thunderstorm by saying you are Hut Orderly, or the postman, or something of that sort."

"Exactly; and, after all, it's quite right. When you get down to bed-rock facts, we're here to learn all we can as quickly as we can learn it, and there'd be no sense in practising arts we all picked up ages ago, such as polishing stoves till you can see your face in 'em, and peeling spuds in the cookhouse."

"What are the instructors like?" asked John.

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"Top-hole. *Some* people! They've forgotten more than I, for one, ever hope to learn. All practical men, who've *done* the job they teach."

"Decent?"

"Quite. Of course, they're frightfully down on any blokes who try to sell them a pup. So long as a fellow does his best they'll help him all they know, but Heaven help a slacker, for *they* won't! Not that we get many of that sort here; they've been picked too carefully."

"In fact," added Jenks, gravely, "we are all jolly good fellows, and extremely intelligent—especially Kinks!"

Kinks concluded his remarks from an improvised throne constructed chiefly of Jenks' recumbent body.

Chapter XII

The Commandant (the familiar, or pet name for the Colonel commanding the Battalion) was, like the great Washington, a truthful man. Whether he had in his youth cut down a cherry tree or not, he certainly did not mislead John in the least when he told him that he would not find time hanging heavily on his hands. Indeed, the old gentleman with the scythe must have wished he could make some arrangement by which an extra hour or so might be added to each day, so as to allow the cadets a little more breathing space. From early morn till dewy eve they were kept busy, and when "night ops" were toward they spent a considerable portion of the dark hours in roaming the country, equipped as for war.

But the work was made so interesting that nobody really minded. It was, of course, the correct thing to "grouse." If his men do not grumble at things in general, the wise com-

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mander scents trouble. A healthy grouse is second nature to the soldier.

John found time to write a good many letters to—various people. One of these, in which he gives some account of his daily life, has been lent to me by a certain lady who is no longer addressed as “Miss”—but that belongs to another story—and I cannot do better than discreetly extract from it such portions as do not concern that lady only:—

“It’s all very well to ask me to describe a day’s work here, but, you see, every day brings its own particular stunts. Perhaps it’s a company parade first thing; well, we fall in, four platoons, you know, as I explained before. Sounds like the old days, doesn’t it? But it’s not, because instead of being a private, you may be a Section Commander, or a Platoon Commander, or any old thing, so that every one gets his chance to command in turn. I got a platoon the other day, and when I got out in front of them I felt as if millions of pairs of eyes were boring holes into the small of my back. When we got the word to advance, I had to yell out, ‘No. 10 Platoon, Quick-March!’ and step out smartly on the

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last word of the order. I opened my mouth for a gigantic roar, and a tiny, thin little whisper came out, apparently from my left nostril. However, it seemed to be all right, for the fellows got going. It's a most curious sensation, walking *in front* of men; they seem to be treading on your heels, and you simply long to break into a trot. If you let yourself hurry, an instructor with a voice like a foghorn bellows, 'No. 10, there! Don't force the pace; you're throwing the whole Company out! *Left*, right! *Left*, right! *Left*—!' When you finish your turn of command and get back into the ranks you feel that you must look like an accident that's just going to happen. . . .

"Then there's Battalion drill, of course, with the Commandant looking on. Nervous work, I can tell you!

"But all that's parade stuff. We do tons of things besides that. They're very keen on lectures here, and they manage to make them so interesting that one doesn't get bored. For instance, say they want to tell us about trench work; well, they put up a man with his left arm off and the M.C. ribbon on his chest, who's been 'over the top' himself, and knows

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just what it feels like, and he tells us all about it in a plain, straightforward way, mixed up with little anecdotes about other fellows. (I notice they never tell you what they've done themselves!)

"Then there's map-reading. It's one thing to read about it in a book, but quite another to take a party from one place to another in strange country, sometimes in the middle of the night.

"And all sorts of other things, you know; camp sanitation, military law and procedure, discipline, and a pile of other subjects.

"But what I want to get at (only I'm so horribly long-winded) is this: the people here are *practical*. They don't just tell you that a thing *is* so; they explain *why* it is so. I often think of my school days and wonder why on earth the educational authorities don't teach the kids as we are taught here. It's all very well to say we are older; that has nothing to do with it. The principle our instructors work on is to *teach*—that is, to see that the fellows *understand* their work; not merely to spend a certain number of hours every day in

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grinding out a sort of parrot-knowledge, and leave the rest to chance.

"Of course, you'll understand that many of the things they tell us are confidential, and not to be repeated. I know how discreet you are, and how perfectly . . . (certain expressions deleted as unnecessary) . . . but just because you're so . . . (deleted) . . . you'll understand that a soldier's duty is to obey, and so I won't say any more. But you can take it that if a fellow can't learn how to be an officer here, he'll never learn it anywhere. . . .

"Night operations, as they are called, are great fun. We do the most tremendous stunts! You've no idea how difficult it is to lead men in the dark. Of course, I'd done 'night ops.' in the ranks but then you've got everything done *for* you. It's very different when you're in command of a party, yourself. . . .

"Now I must positively shut up. The final exam is on next week, and I'm swotting pretty hard. I'm not going to predict results, but I'm hoping not to disgrace you. . . ."

From all which it is evident that one cadet,

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at least, seems to have found the British military authorities less utterly unintelligent than certain arm-chair critics (poor fellows!) would have us believe.

Chapter XIII

"Lance-Corporal Martin!"

"Sir!"

John walked as well as his trembling knees would allow him into the C.O.'s room, and gave what he felt to be a very feeble salute. The final examination had come and gone, and he was now to learn whether he had passed or whether (awful thought) he had been weighed in the balance and found wanting.

"Good morning, Martin."

(That sounded hopeful.)

"I am glad to tell you"—(John's heart gave a thump)—"that you have passed your examination very creditably—very creditably indeed. In fact, I have made a special note on your papers which will do you no harm in whatever unit you go to. You may proceed on leave now, and get your kit together, and keep your eye on the 'Gazette'! Good-bye, and good luck to you."

Resisting a desire to throw his arms round

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the Commandant's neck, John got himself out of the room somehow and returned to the "Lodge," where he received the congratulations of his friends. Kinks and Jenks had qualified some time before, and departed, and John was now the senior cadet of the hut.

It was a busy day. There were hands to shake and bags to pack; an interview with his Company Commander; a hundred things to see to.

Then, hey for the train!

What a joy to be home again, and what a singular coincidence it was that a certain cousin (well removed) should be staying with his mother, to keep her company, just as on the occasion of his first leave.

What a jolly time buying kit! The extraordinary number of things his mother and the cousin (once removed) wanted to get! John had to explain that a subaltern officer is not allowed to requisition four Pantehnicons for his personal effects.

All the same, he did himself pretty well. He was no raw soldier, to be overcome by wiles of artful tradesmen and wheedled into

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purchasing pretty-pretties which would be of no use to him.

No! Smart he would be, with well cut clothes and neat boots, but the clothes would be built for comfort as well as style, and the boots easy and waterproof, or he would know the reason why.

When everything had come home what a jolly dress rehearsal! What feminine exclamations of awe at the big revolver, and what joy over the imposing great-coat with its wide skirts and numerous buttons.

There was only one thing lacking—the Single Star to fill the blank spaces on the sleeves. But it was not lacking long.

One fine morning a letter arrived which caused two women's lips to quiver and one old man's hand to tremble, and one young man's heart to swell with anticipation. The "Times" lay beside John's plate, and, from force of habit, he turned to the "Gazette" even before he opened the official missive. There it was, the long expected entry:

"To be Second Lieutenant, John Edward Martin."

The letter was soon read; it was a curt order

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to report himself for duty with the famous "Fighting —th," a regiment known throughout the world for its splendid record. So much for the Commandant's recommendation.

The meal was quietly cheerful. Preparations for departure took but a short time, for John's baggage had been packed for days.

Nor did the "Good-byes" take long. They were not a demonstrative people, perhaps because they felt so deeply.

"Good-bye, Mother."

"Good-bye, my dear, dear boy. God preserve you for us."

"Good-bye, Dad."

"Good luck, my boy. I'm not going to give you any advice. Do your duty as an officer as you've done it in the ranks. You'll be away across the water soon, I don't doubt; remember that we'll be thinking of you—and—and—There my lad; good-bye and God be with you."

The last farewell was spoken apart.

"Good-bye, Mary. Don't cry, little girl. I'll soon be back with you, and then—then, I'll ask you something you know the answer to."

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"Good-bye, John—" very bravely. "I—I know what you mean. Why shouldn't I say it? I'm,—I'm proud of you, and—"

John stooped and kissed the trembling lips.

A wave of the hand, and the cab drove off.

John swallowed a curious lump that had suddenly risen in his throat, and resolved that come what might, he would bear himself so that those he left behind should never have cause to blush for him.

He bent his head in a silent prayer that he might never disgrace the traditions of the British officer, whose badge he carried upon his sleeve—the Single Star.

THE END





